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Deposited in DRO:

01 November 2016

Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Not peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Burgess, C. and Gilmour, S. and Church, M. J. (1996) 'Guinnerso (Uig Parish).', Discovery and excavation in Scotland. . pp. 111-112.

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Guinnerso (Uig Parish)

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Relict Landscape

NB 034362: Located 3 km to the north-west of the Township of Crowlista and 2 km to the south-west of the Township of Aird Uig on very remote sea cliffs are the remains of a relict landscape. Centred around the partially drained loch of Ruadh Guinnerso are a series of features including walls, cultivation, clearance cairns, cellular structures and several possible burial cairns that have survived due to the remoteness of the site.

To the south of the loch is a concentration of cellular structures on the saddle of a ridge. This comprises a mound of stones up to 2 metres in height and 11 metres in diameter with smaller 'satellite' circular features. The main stone mound was visibly multi-phase, the latest of which was a small rectangular drystone building with a well paved floor and single western entrance. Excavations were centred around the main stone feature with trenches being opened around the south-east edge of the mound and on its summit.

In the south-east quadrant of the mound are a series of structures including a rectilinear stone platform with hearth. Underlying these is a flue or floor drain associated with an overlying extensive hearth area and lengths of walling. The earliest visible structure to date is rectilinear with stone walls often utilising the quarried bedrock outcrop to the south.

Excavations on top of the mound revealed an underlying series of sub-rectilinear structures with two opposing elongated entrances; the earlier of these have a pair of alcoves measuring approximately 0.3 metres wide by 0.8 metres deep in the north wall. Large amounts of peat ash were deposited on the floors of these structures and within one of the alcoves.

Examination of the two entrances seems to indicate that the western one was used solely for entrance as no peat ash was found within it, while the eastern one was used primarily for egress as quantities of peat ash were found trampled into the floor surface.

Test excavations in a single cell to the east of the main mound indicated that it was of the same basic construction; a cellular form that was repeated elsewhere in the landscape.

Large quantities of pottery were recovered including extremely fine handmade wares and fragments of vessels that may be skuemorphs of bronze vessels. These and other artefacts including a slate burnisher and several quartz tools, among which was a tanged arrowhead, seem to point to a Late Bronze Age date for the contexts excavated. The large quantities of carbonised materials recovered will provide C14 AMS dates in due course.

Core samples were also taken from the loch, where a depth of up to 5.25 metres (much of it laminated) was reached, with the aim of providing a climatic record for the prehistoric period in the vicinity. It is hoped that this unique landscape will be the subject of future investigation to help characterise all aspects of this elusive period in the Western Isles.

Sponsors: Historic Scotland, The Monroe Fund - University of Edinburgh, Russell Trust and Department of Archaeology - University of Edinburgh.